

RELIGIONmatters

UNC CHARLOTTE • DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES • AUG 2018

Photo and newsletter design by Haley Twist

A Message from Dr. Maguire, Department Chair



As summer ends and a new semester begins, I would like to extend my appreciation to all students, staff, and faculty who work within and for the

Department of Religious Studies. Over the past two years, we have welcomed new colleagues and bid farewell to others. This newsletter aims to capture our activities in 2016-2018 academic years. Any oversight is my own.

In fall 2017, we welcomed Alexandra Kaloyanides (Ph.D. Yale) and William E. B. Sherman (Ph.D. Stanford) as new Assistant Professors. Dr. Kaloyanides currently teaches courses on Buddhism and RELS 2600, our orientation to the discipline. Dr. Sherman currently teaches courses on Islam and RELS 4600, our capstone course. He is the 2016-17 recipient of the Pizada Prize for his dissertation from the Institute for South Asian Studies at UC Berkeley.

In fall 2018, we welcome Letha Victor (Ph.D. University of Toronto) as a new Assistant Professor and Prea Persaud (Ph.D. University of Florida pending) as a Lecturer. Dr. Victor is an anthropologist hired to teach courses in religion and healing, and Prea Persaud will teach courses in Hinduism, particularly beyond India. See pp. 2 to learn more about Dr. Victor and Prea Persaud. We also welcome Karyn Williamson-Coria as our new Business Services Coordinator. Karyn comes to us with Ph.D. in French Literature and Expanded French Studies from University of Il-

inois at Urbana-Champaign. She has experience working on campus as a well as a range of teaching experience.

Sadly, two early founders of our department died in the past few years. Dr. Loy H. Witherspoon, who founded the department in 1964, died on January 15, 2017. He retired in 1994 after 30 years of service to UNCC, as the founding chair of the department and as a close friend of university founder Bonnie Cone. His legacy lives on in our annual lecture series, in a scholarship in his name, and in the naming of Witherspoon Hall on campus. See pp. 5 of this newsletter for more about Dr. Witherspoon.

Dr. J. Daniel White, who had planned to retire on June 30, 2018, after 47 years of teaching at UNCC, died unexpectedly on June 12, 2018. See p. 5 and 6 of this newsletter to read part of one of Dr. White's last interviews. On behalf of all of his colleagues in this department and the university, I express our immense sadness at this loss of a colleague and friend.

Jenna Baker, who served the department so well for four years, has become an Executive Assistant for the UNC-Chapel Hill Nutrition Research Institute, working out of their Kannapolis Research Campus. We all wish her the very best.

In 2017, department faculty produced an edited volume, four peer-reviewed journal articles, eight book chapters, twenty-six conference presentations or formal responses, and thirteen invited lectures. Our next book will be Dr. Maguire's co-authored book for students,

The Religious Studies Skills Book, which is due out this fall from Bloomsbury. We also maintained a very busy schedule of colloquia for faculty and students over the last few years, some of which are featured here.

Our teaching continues to be recognized on campus and beyond. In addition to honors for Barbara Thiede, Janna Shedd, and Joanne Maguire in recent years, Ashley Bryan was honored with the CLAS Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Part-Time Faculty member in 2017. In spring 2018, David Clausen was celebrated as a finalist for the same award.

Former students also deserve mention here. Several of our recent undergraduate and M.A. students have gone on to further study: Casey Aldridge (Princeton); Robert Lee (University of Florida); Jakob Breunig (Indiana University); and Josh Williams (Ohio State University).

Special thanks to Samuel Davis, Editor-in-Chief of this newsletter, and to his staff writers, including Gabrielle Haley Jakob Breunig, Christina Grobmeier, and David Flaherty. Extra thanks also to David Flaherty, who has done immeasurable work for this department, and to Morgan Whitted, our student worker who will be returning for another school year.

I wish you all a productive and rewarding academic year.

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@UNCC_Rels

Website: religiousstudies.uncc.edu

Welcoming our Newest Faculty

BY SAM DAVIS



Prea Persaud

Prea Persaud will be defending her dissertation, "God Must be a Trini: Transforming Hinduism into a Caribbean Religion," at the University of Florida this year, combining her research interests of global Hinduism, Caribbean Studies, diasporic religion, race and identity, postcolonial studies, and anthropology. She received her M.A. at Syracuse and received a Certification of Advanced Study in South Asian Studies.



Alex Kaloyanides

Dr. Kaloyanides has served as Assistant Professor since Fall 2017, focusing on Buddhism and material culture of Religion. She defended her dissertation, "Baptizing Buddhists: The Nineteenth-Century American Missionary Encounter with Burmese Buddhism" at Yale University in 2015 and received her M.A. in 2013. She was a Postdoctoral Scholar at the Ho Center for Buddhist Studies at Stanford until she accepted her position at UNCC in 2017.



Letha Victor

Dr. Victor defended her dissertation, "Dirty Things: Violence, Spirit Forces, and Social Change in Acholi, Uganda," from the University of Toronto in May 2018 following 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork in northern Uganda, developing her interests in anthropologies of religion, violence and healing. She completed her M.A. in Anthropology with Development Studies from McGill University.



Will Sherman

Having completed the ACLS/Mellon Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Dr. Sherman was hired in 2017 as Assistant Professor focusing on Islam in Central and South Asia, Persian Sufi hagiographies, Islam in America, Islamic Eschatology, and historical religion. He defended his dissertation, "Mountains and Messiahs: The Roshaniyya, Revelation, ad Afghan Becoming," at Stanford University and received his M.A. in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from UCLA in 2011.

Religious Literacy Through Stories: A Community Project

By JOANNE MAGUIRE

Several members of the department are involved in developing a religious literacy narrative-focused curriculum for multiple audiences. Research shows that teaching religious literacy through abstracted lessons on the "core principles" of a religious tradition is not only ineffective but frequently flattens religious traditions into little more than a "strange" set of doctrines from what appears to be a monolithic group. By focusing on stories through time, this project allows for learners to see religions as living traditions that are constantly remade through the act of sharing—and interpreting—common narratives. These stories are distinctive to particular traditions

while overlapping with others, yielding interesting insights from multiple perspectives.

At first, the curriculum will be adapted to three contexts:

- in home salons for small groups of adult learners;
- a short school break course for school-aged children whose parents want to supplement their education;
- a series of public forums for civic leaders, community members, and dedicated life-long learners.

Additionally, this project aims to expand and incorporate the storytelling of local residents of Charlotte, by recording and curating local sto-

ries on common religious narratives.

Future plans include a curriculum designed for professionals (e.g. business, law, or medicine) and summer seminars for K-12 teachers. The academic expertise for this project will come from the Department of Religious Studies at UNC Charlotte, which puts the project squarely in academic rather than interfaith territory.

This project has been made possible by a number of community donors: Chris and Jim Teat; Lynwood and Lulie Mallard; and John Thompson. We as a department are most grateful to these donors for their generosity.

Course Talk with Drs. Alex Kaloyanides and Will Sherman

Having completed their first year at UNCC, Dr. Kaloyanides and Dr. Sherman discuss what to expect in their upcoming classes

BY DAVID FLAHERTY



Q: Describe your course, "Material Culture of Religion."

This seminar is about the roles objects and sensory experiences play in religious lives and in the study of religion. Together, the students and I will think about the religious lives of things. What can the texture of prayer beads tell us about Buddhists meditation? How do tattoos of crosses affect the Christians who have

them? What do food offerings do for Hindu rituals? How do cathedral organs contribute to the lived experience of a mass?

Over the course of the semester we explore these questions in two major ways: 1) each student will develop their own research project around a religious object or set of objects of their choosing; and 2) we will read and discuss prominent scholarship on the study of religion and material culture. Many readings will focus on the role objects play in Asian religious communities, since that is my particular area of expertise, but we will also be considering material cultures from a wider range of religious traditions.

I was inspired to develop this course out of my own research into the religious histories of objects from nineteenth-century Burma. The book project I am currently working on, *Objects of Conversion, Relics of Resistance*, looks at objects such as spirit shrines, golden books, Christian portraits, missionary maps, and Buddhist

globes to understand the ways that people in Burma in this period expressed and transformed their religious identities.

We will learn how to investigate expressions of religion that are not primarily textual. How do we tell the biography of a religious statue? How do we write in an academic way about the sounds and smells of religious festivals? How does consideration of sensory cultures relate to other concerns in the history of the field of religious studies?

I hope that students will come away from the course with new ways of thinking about the religious lives of objects. I hope they will develop sharper ways of analyzing the ways that things and sensations influence religious communities. I hope we will all come away thinking differently about the ways that religious objects both empower and deny.



Q: What is your course, "Muslims and the 'Making of America,'" about?

In simplest terms, it's right there in the title: Muslims and the "making of America." (I'll confess here that I borrowed the title from an excellent book by Amir Hussain.) Throughout this

course, we explore the many ways that Muslims have participated in the history of North America since the 16th century slave trade. We also examine the role that an idea or an imagination of Islam and Muslims played in the lives of non-Muslim Americans. We follow both of these threads—the experience of Muslims and the imagination of Islam held by non-Muslims—all the way into our present day. In that sense, this course has an historical arc.

When I talk about this course, it often surprises many people that there even is a history of Muslims in the Americas—that many of the enslaved Africans brought to the colonies were Muslim, that Islam was central to the lives of many African Americans during the period of the Great Migration, that some of the best jazz musicians and hip

hop artists have found inspiration in their practice of Islam, and so on. Many students find this history surprising given that it contradicts a widely-held idea in the U.S. media that Muslims are recent arrivals in the United States. This sense of surprise, however, is useful for the course for it allows us to pivot into a bigger question: why do we know what we know about Islam? What is it about American conceptions of race, religion, immigration, conversion, policing, and so on that has caused many among us to be so surprised that Muslims have been important participants in this country for centuries?

Full interviews by David Flaherty with Drs. Kaloyanides and Sherman among others can be found on our new website: religiousstudies.uncc.edu

"What inspired you to study religion?"

David Flaherty caught up with our newest faculty, Prea Persaud and Letha Victor, to talk about their reasons for teaching and studying religion as a career

BY DAVID FLAHERTY



PREA PERSAUD

My route to religious studies is a bit unusual in that I have always been interested in religion and culture. My interest began in high school

and then I majored in religion and philosophy as an undergrad and have never changed my focus. That's unusual because it is perfectly normal (and often a good thing!) to change your major several times during college. But I have always found religion endlessly fascinating and have had the benefit of having extraordinary teachers that have continued to inspire me. The thing is, most people (outside of academia) have this idea that religion is just about god and the supernatural. They don't appreciate religion's dynamic and complicated relationship with all facets of our lives – gender, power, the environment, food, trauma, etc. It's difficult to pin down "religion" or to fit all religious people in a box. You can study it endlessly and still not find the bottom of the barrel.



LETHA VICTOR

I came to study religion entirely by accident. In fact, I never took any courses about religion during my BA! My studies were focused on political science, international relations, and anthropology (but I took no anthropology of religion courses). Despite that, one of the key things I learned in my early anthropological training is that it's important to be open to the world around you, and to take people seriously when they say something matters to them. And so, when I first started doing ethnographic research in northern Uganda (where I was looking at issues to do with justice and reconciliation related to wartime violence), I tried my best to be attuned to many different aspects of people's everyday lives. Because of that, I came out of my first fieldwork experiences with different questions than the ones I had started with—as most researchers do.

ADDITIONAL FACULTY NEWS

Ashley Bryan received the CLAS Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Part-Time Faculty Member in 2017.

David Clausen was a finalist for the CLAS Award for Outstanding Teaching by a Part-Time Faculty Member in May 2018.

Tina Katsanos was promoted to Senior Lecturer in 2017.

Joanne Maguire completed her 3-year Chair Comprehensive Review and was promoted to Full Professor in 2017.

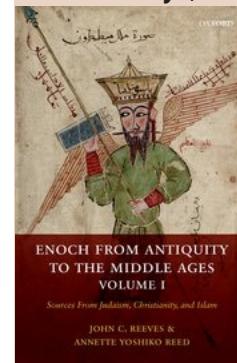
Will Sherman won the [S.S. Pirzada prize](#) in 2017 from the University of California at Berkeley for his dissertation, "Mountains and Messiahs: The Roshaniyya, Revelation, and Afghan Becoming."

James Tabor's [blog](#) continues to be rated in the Top Ten of the "Top 50 BiblioBlogs" with over 1.5 million page views since 2012.



FACULTY BOOKSHELF

Published May 1, 2018



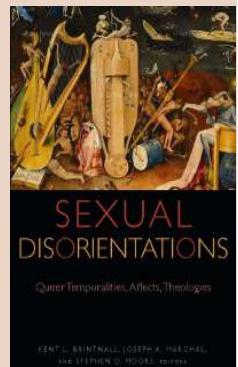
**Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages
Sources from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,
Volume I**

John C. Reeves &
Annette Yoshiko
Reed

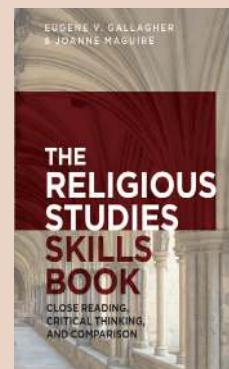
Published November 7, 2017

**Sexual Disorientations:
Queer Temporalities,
Affects, Theologies**

Edited by: Kent
Brintnall, Joseph
Marchal, & Stephen
Moore



Forthcoming Publication: To be Published
Fall 2018



**THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES SKILLS BOOK:
CLOSE READING, CRITICAL THINKING, AND
COMPARISON**

Joanne Maguire &
Eugene Gallagher

Remembering Professor Dan White

Read David Flaherty's interview with Dan White from Spring 2018

BY DAVID FLAHERTY



DAVID: How would you describe yourself as an instructor and what type of standards do you intend to uphold when teaching at a university or in general?

DAN: When I was hired by UNC Charlotte back in late spring, early summer, of 1971, I was told at the time of my interview that my priority was the students here at the university – that was my first priority: teaching the students here and engaging with them in their academic life. That has been my priority since the beginning of my time here. I have done research. I have done a lot of public service.

I have done a lot of things for which I am paid by the university, but I still hold that what I was hired to do was to teach and engage students.

DAVID: When was the first time you visited India and where was it?

DAN: When I was in graduate school I went over one summer to do what was called an “Exploratory Visit” of eight weeks to see what the possibilities were for developing my dissertation. That was my first trip while I was still in graduate school. And since that time, I have been a number of times for other reasons. I conducted five Fulbright Hayes seminars for American university faculty in India to teach them Indian Art and Architecture. I have been on many trips as the lecturer for the Smithsonian Institution’s study trips to India as well as study trips to India by the Archeological Institute of America, the American Museum of Natural History, um, Archaeological tours, and other museums and institutions.

DAVID: What initially prompted you to study India and South Asia?

DAN: Well, that is a good question and I have a couple of answers to that:

One is that I think when I was six years old my grandfather gave me a membership in the National Geographic Society and I started receiving *National Geographic* magazine – that was 1951 – only four years after India had received its independence from British colonial rule, and there were a lot of articles about India and other parts about South and South East Asia. So I became very much attracted to Asia at that time. Even before that my grandfather gave me a gift out of his own collection of National Geographic maps of the last map that was ever created of British India by the National Geographic Society, the last map ever created of British Colonial rule in India and the territories that they ruled. So, I was always attracted to India and other parts of South and South East Asia. I think that

was a major influence.

But I have another story that is much more interesting in some ways. I had dear friends in Madras – a couple I stayed with a number of times while I went to India. Back some time in the mid to late ‘70s I was staying in their home for a couple of weeks while I was in Madras. And one night after dinner the wife said over a cup of coffee: “Why is it that you are so interested in India?” I said: “Well, it’s my profession.” She said: “Well, you come to Madras a lot. Why do you come to Madras?” I said: “Some of my research is here in the archives and in the art and architecture and the museums and on site at some temples and so forth.” She said: “I think there is another reason why you come to Madras. Because you are a Sanskrit pandit and teach Sanskrit, I think in your previous lifetime you were probably a Sanskrit pandit here in Madras.” I said: “Oh I don’t know...maybe so.” She said: “Oh, I think it must be so. I think that’s where you were in your previous life time in those places so you’re going back to re-discover yourself there. You lived in Madras for many, many years, maybe your whole life. But what bad karma you must have done to be born in the United States this time.” Who knows? There may be something to that or there may be nothing to that. But that’s her take on why I was so interested in India.

DAVID: Describe some obstacles you faced when originally pursuing your studies?

DAN: That’s a difficult question. I don’t think there are any personal obstacles because I never let personal obstacles get in the way with what I want to do personally or professionally. I’m the kind of person who says: ‘Why should someone else determine the life I live?’ I wouldn’t say it’s narcissistic, but my grandfather told me that you have to make the choices you make. Don’t let other people force you in the choices you have. So, if there are obstacles, they are obstacles I have often times created by myself in wondering if I

Loy Witherspoon

Death of department founder, Professor Emeritus



Loy H. Witherspoon, professor emeritus of philosophy and religious studies at UNC Charlotte and a long-time confidant to University

founder Bonnie Cone, passed away on Sunday, Jan. 15, 2017 in his home. [Dr. Witherspoon's obituary was published in the Charlotte Observer on January 17, 2017.](#)

Continued on pp. 6...



DEPARTMENT FACULTY

Department Chair

**Joanne Maguire - Ph.D.,
University of Chicago**

Full-Time Faculty

Kent Brintnall - Ph.D., Emory

Eric Hoenes del Pinal - Ph.D.,

University of California, San Diego

Kathryn Johnson - Ph.D., Harvard

Alex Kaloyanides - Ph.D., Yale

Tina Katsanos - M.A., USC Columbia

Sean McCloud - Ph.D., UNC Chapel Hill

Prea Persaud - Ph.D., University of Florida

John C. Reeves - Ph.D., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

Julia Maria Moore - Ph.D., Michigan State

William Sherman - Ph.D., UC Berkeley

Celia Sinclair - M.A., Yale Divinity School

James D. Tabor - Ph.D., University of Chicago

Barbara Thiede - Ph.D., University of Missouri

Letha Victor - Ph.D., University of Toronto

Part-Time Faculty

David Clausen - M.A., UNC Charlotte

Janna Shedd - M.A., UNC Charlotte

Ashley Bryan - M.A., UNC Charlotte

Administration

Jenna Baker - B.A., UNC Greensboro (through June 2018)

Karyn Williamson-Coria - Ph.D., University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Beginning August 2018)

Dan White Continued...

Continued from pp. 5

can do this or have time to do this or have the resources to do this. Will this take me in another direction? They're not really obstacles, they are decisions I make about directions to take, I think.

DAVID: What is the most memorable experience you've had while at UNC Charlotte?

DAN: One of them has been the very good students I've had. I find it almost unbelievable that so many students can share with me the interests that I have. I have had a lot of good students – graduate and undergraduate. And I consider them more than students. I consider them friends – the really good students. The other ones... not that I don't care about them... but they decided they wanted to go another direction and that's fine. On the whole, I have had a really good relationship with almost every colleague I've had in the department – some who didn't stay very long and who were not very collegial with others... But this department has been an excellent department for relationships that involve collegiality, friendships, and professional activity. And I've had a lot of other friends in the university. This university has good leadership and provided opportunities for faculty to do what they do best. In fact, I was told when I came here in my interview that 'we are hiring you to teach Asian religions. Since your field is primarily South Asian Religions, that's what we want you to do primarily. And you decide the direction you want to go in teaching those subjects.' And I did! I was given the freedom to do it. I was never told I had to teach X, Y, or Z. I was told that this is what you are trained to do, so do that and do it well. That has been a pathway I have taken that I don't think every college or university necessarily gives its faculty. But I think that's one of the best elements of this university's faculty. It is the freedom to develop the faculty member's own field of interests in various ways.

DAVID: What advice do you have for students in Religious Studies (or any other Humanities field) who struggle with bal-

ancing societal expectations with their internal desire and passion to learn beyond it?

DAN: The first is to be true to yourself - to let my life be my life and not the life someone else wants it to be. Some students say, 'My parents want me to do this or that.' But, what you need to do is say that 'you have given me a life to engage myself. You have given me the freedom to engage myself in my life and make mature decisions. And, so I will do what I need to do to make those mature decisions – to make my life as positive and contributing to the world as I can.' So that's what I would tell them first.

Second, I would tell them to never stop learning. Never stop engaging with ideas and issues. Always keep reading. Third, I would say to find a job that you enjoy. Don't live in misery vocationally. Find a job you enjoy that will provide for you financially. Don't let that job make you miserable. Find a job that merges with your other interests so that you can be the whole person that you are, whether you are engaged in personal or professional interests.



Dan White at the Temple of Chomundi (Durga) in India during summer 2015

Dr. White's Obituary was published in *The Charlotte Observer* on JUNE 17, 2018. The link can be found in the news section of the department's website.

Completion of Wabash Center Pedagogy Development Grant

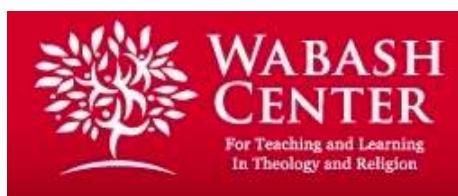
BY SAM DAVIS

In the Fall of 2015, Drs. Kent Brinknall and Joanne Maguire were awarded a grant through the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion. Over the course of the next two years, the two professors conducted a three-phase study. The first phase consisted of students who had taken at least two courses within the Department participating in either focus groups or an online survey. The data gathered from the focus groups and surveys served to develop the curriculum for a faculty retreat held in April, 2016. Once the data was analyzed, it was time to develop phase two which took place in Fall 2016.

Phase two consisted of focused workshops designed to help faculty work on different aspects of their teaching such as assessment, developing assignments, evaluating student writing, and recruitment.

Phase three began in Spring 2017, allowing students to respond to what the faculty thought they had learned about effective teaching, and ended with a regional conference held at Center City on April 7, 2017. The details can be found in the green section on page 11.

The grant provided \$30,000 for 18 months of programming between 2016-2017. The department thanks the Wabash Center for its generous support for this work.



UNCC SPRING BREAK 2019: WORLD RELIGIONS IN LONDON

London and Beyond

Join Religious Studies Professor Will Sherman and other students on a visit to London, an ideal microcosm for the study of religious practices, symbolism, and spaces of people in multiple religious traditions. Site visits will include several major and minor Christian churches as well as a Sikh temple, a Jewish synagogue, an Islamic mosque, a Hindu temple, and a Buddhist meditation center. Students will experience a Roman Catholic Mass in Latin, explore a crusader church, enjoy a lunchtime chamber music concert in a historic church, and visit a Victorian garden cemetery. A day trip will allow students to experience Stonehenge, Salisbury Cathedral, and the Roman city of Bath. Students will come away with an appreciation of the complexity and beauty of different worldviews living side by side.

Why go?

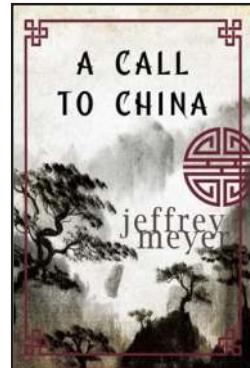
Because London is a fabulous city, full of a lifetime of adventures. Because religion matters to world events and to individual lives. Because Americans tend not to know much about world religions. And because London is an ideal place to study religions of the world in practice. Plus, employers love applicants who have studied abroad.

For more information on this incredible experience you don't want to miss, visit worldreligionsspringbreaklondon.weebly.com or contact Will Sherman at wsherman2@uncc.edu.

Jeffrey Meyer: *A Call to China*

Dr. Meyer has been named a Silver Winner in the historical fiction category of the Independent Book Publishers Association Benjamin Franklin Awards

BY: SAM DAVIS



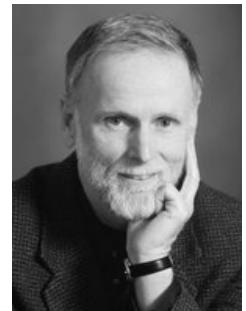
Jeffrey Meyer has always felt a connection to China. He felt his "call to China" as a young boy, after reading Pearl S. Buck's *The Good Earth* and Lin Yutang's *The Importance of Living*. He would go on to devote his life and career to learning Chinese culture.

A professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte for thirty-five years, Jeffrey taught Asian religions in the Religious Studies department, with a focus on Buddhism and Daoism. He is married with three grown children, currently living in Davidson, North Carolina. *A Call to China* is his first

novel. We as a department would like to congratulate the Professor Emeritus for this outstanding achievement.

A Call to China was featured in the October 2017 issue of [Lake Norman Currents](#).

Book information and photo credit go to the publisher, Ingram Elliot, 2015.



Department inducts thirteen students into Theta Alpha Kappa in 2017 and expect to induct several in 2018

Chapter honors faculty and exceptional students for 3rd and 4th consecutive year
BY SAM DAVIS



Faculty and students were recognized in a ceremony in December, 2017. PHOTO BY JENNA BAKER



OUR 2017-18 UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

Lambda Chi Alpha - Loy H. Witherspoon Scholarship in Religious Studies

DAVID FLAHERTY (2018)
ANANIAH CLARK & ELIZABETH ALLS (2017)

The Lambda Chi Alpha-Loy H. Witherspoon Scholarship is named for the founding chair of the department, first hired in 1964 and held the position of Professor Emeritus of Philosophy and Religious Studies until his death in 2017.

Recipients for both awards are chosen by the faculty annually. Recipients have demonstrated by their academic performance a serious commitment to the field of religious studies.

Richard A. Underwood Scholarship in Religious Studies

ANNA LEWIS (2018)
JAKOB BREUNIG (2017)

Richard A. Underwood was hired in 1975 to teach religion and modern culture and to serve as department chair. He retired in 1992. His widow, Joan Underwood, funds the scholarship.

LIST OF RECENT UNDERGRADUATE ALUMNI:

Fall 2017: Joseph Amezquita, Brittany Allison, Lily Archila, Kimberly Clark, Esward Kishko, Carley Moreno, Adam Piephoff, Justin Spargo

Spring 2018: Shelby Caruso, Spencer Blackwell, Sarah Presnell, Madison White, Kevin Tran, John Heavner, Jakob Breunig, Julie Caldwell, Joshua Casper, Ananiah Clark, Colby Fagan, Samuel Johnson, Michael Radford, Alejandra Seiwert, Briona Townsend, Retho Williams, Natiya Williamson



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR GRADUATES!

2018 Graduate Students

Aleah Cornett | Thesis:

"The Name with Which You Ascend to Heaven": Semiotic and Linguistic Ideology in the Midrash of Shemhazai and 'Aza'el"

Gabrielle Haley | Thesis:

"The Pragmatism of Food Porn: Modern Media as a Mode of Zen Perpetuation"

Bill Bowmer | Thesis:

"The Persistence of Images: Murti, Monotheisms, and Museums"

Jason Graham | Thesis:

"Ritual Flexibility: Insights from and for Applied Behavior Analysis"

Robert Lee | Thesis:

"American Atheism: An Analysis of Eighteenth-Century Stigma Borne by Twenty-First Century Citizens"

Sev Matheron | Comprehensive Exams:

Passed exams on Catholicism and Sexual Abuse

2017 Graduate Students

Chelsea Carskaddon | Thesis:

"Perceived Versus Experienced: Religious Othering on a College Campus"

Zannah Kimbrel | Thesis:

"Penetrating the Seventh Palace: Reading the Sexual Dimensions of the Hebrew Book of Enoch and the Hekhalot Genre."

Samantha Webster | Thesis:

"The History of the Curse: A Comparative Look at the Religious and Social Taboos of Menstruation and the Influence They Have on American Society Today"

Featured Religious Studies Courses

Spring 2018

Annihilation of the Self: The Literature of Sufi Islam - Will Sherman

This course examines persistent questions found in the literature of mystical, Sufi Islam: what is the self? What is its relationship to language? And must it be annihilated through “unsaying” in order to know God? By reading a range of Sufi texts in translation, this course explores how “annihilation” is an important theme throughout the history of the Islamic world, including in the contemporary period. In the cryptic musings of early Baghdadi Sufis, the love-struck poems of Rumi, and the miraculous stories of saints, this course traces the methods and paradoxes by which Sufi Muslims have attempted to use language to mold—and unmake—the self.

Fall 2018

From Catastrophe to Cash: The Marketing of the Holocaust - Barbara Thiede

Tourists sign up for tours to concentration camps and mass gravesites. Filmmakers and moviegoers now choose from a variety of Holocaust themed films or memes. Children’s literature on the Holocaust has emerged as a field in its own right, supporting the curricula planned, presented, discussed and published. Memorial sites include the requisite museum shops on the property once marked by barracks and gas chambers. This course will explore the marketing of the Holocaust in modern culture. From archetypical scenes of dead and skeletal bodies to fictional revenge narratives: In what ways has modern western capitalist culture permitted, supported, and encouraged profit-making, merchandizing, and marketing of mass murder?

What is Identity? - Sean McCloud

What are the histories, relationships, choices, and happenstance events that make us who we are? What are the factors that encourage us to change our identities over our life course? This class examines these questions through autobiographies, films, documentaries, and scholarship focusing on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and other ways that we identify ourselves, and others identify us, in the contemporary United States. As a “Prospect for Success” course, the class is designed to help new students develop their commitment to success, inquiry skills, and cultural awareness during their first semester here at UNCC.

The Devil - Eric Hoenes

A cross-cultural investigation of the ultimate personification of evil and moral corruption—namely, the Devil. This class examines how radical evil came to be personified in Christianity, as well as how the Devil has been invoked in religious texts, political imaginaries, and ritual practices in the modern world.

Spring 2019

The College of Sociology - Kent Brintnall

Founded in the late 1930s in the face of the collapse of capitalist markets, the waning legitimacy of democracies in Europe, the rise of fascism, the limitations of Marxist agitation, and the revelation of Stalinist terror, the College of Sociology was a left-wing political experiment of the French avant-garde that attempted to think politics and the social anew relying on senses of community and the sacred found in the work of French sociologists Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. Georges Bataille, a founding member of the College and a primary mover of its work, was involved in a number of related aesthetic, political, and religious experiments during this period. Although short-lived, the College has on-going relevance for questions about the appeal of fascism and totalitarianism, the intractability of violence, the cultural operation of religion, the political relevance of art, and the constitution of the self in relation to the social. The seminar will give close attention to primary texts produced by the College’s members, works by their intellectual forebears and inspirations, and secondary literature on the College. All texts will be read in English translation. This seminar should be of interest to students in religious studies, sociology, anthropology, history, literary studies, French studies, ethics, political theory, and art history.

Religious Studies Undergraduate Honors Theses

The department would like to congratulate these students for their amazing achievement

Casey Aldridge | Spring 2017:

“Prometheus Bound to Eurocentric Error: Christ and Exteriorty in Latin American Liberation Theology —or— The Problems of Exporting Proletarian Self-Emancipation”

Jakob Zalman Breunig |

Spring 2018:

“Unknown Pleasures: A Reconsideration of Critical Responses to Sex in *Sophie’s Choice* and *Schindler’s List*”

Madison White | Spring 2018:

“Moravians and the Issue of Race”

SUPPORT YOUR DEPARTMENT

Thanks to generous individuals such as Loy H. Witherspoon, Dr. William Pfiscner, the Lambda Chi Alpha fraternity, the Phillips family, Alice B. Tate, Carol Ann Douglas, and Joan Underwood, the department is able to award student scholarships and support research and public lectures. If you would like to make a tax-deductible contribution that supports those causes, please visit the department webpage (religiousstudies.uncc.edu) and click on the “Donate Now” link.

Graduate Student does Research in Nepal

Lindsay Carroll shares her experiences studying violence and animal sacrifice

BY LINDSAY CARROLL



My current research in Nepal involves the study of animal sacrifice in Kathmandu and its surrounding towns and villages. I am interested in studying the ways in which scholars have used the word “violent” to describe animal sacrifice. Would Hindus in Nepal agree with the description of sacrifice as “violent,” and if so, to what degree? My research involves interviews with Nepalese Hindus who have participated in or observed animal sacrifice, and it also involves observations of my own.

During my stay in Nepal, I had the opportunity to observe the practice of animal sacrifice at the Daksinkali Temple located just to the south of Kathmandu. It was an incredible experience, and I found that doing ethnographic-style research comes with rich rewards. My research has given me a shift of perspective, a deeper appreciation for my topic of study and all those who I’ve spoken to, and perhaps most importantly, it has allowed me to glimpse life through the eyes of another. None of this is without its challenges, however; language barri-

ers, unfamiliarity with cultural norms, and even perhaps a bit of homesickness have made this endeavor difficult at times.

Nevertheless, I can say in all honesty that my classes and instructors at UNC Charlotte gave me a solid foundation upon which to move forward to begin my research abroad. In the religious studies graduate program at UNC Charlotte, I gained the skills to be able to approach the study of another’s religion with sensitivity, openness, and non-bias. I learned to problem-solve, to question theories and opinions, to think critically, and to assess my own skills and potential for contributing to the larger field of religion in academia. It certainly hasn’t been an easy journey, but as I approach the end of my studies at UNC Charlotte I am immensely grateful for this experience. The program has enriched my life and has led me to places I’d never be had I not chosen to delve into the study of religion at UNC Charlotte.



Alumni Publishes Paper in University of Toronto Press

BY SAM DAVIS

Casey Aldridge, a Religious Studies and History major who graduated in 2017 to pursue a graduate degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, just published on August 7, 2018 a paper he started here at UNCC with Professor Joanne Maguire. The paper, titled “‘Watch the Blood-Soaked Old General in Action’: Blochian Atheism, Exodus, and Utopia in *Doctor Who*,” closely analyzes the eighth series of modern *Doctor Who* alongside Ernst Bloch’s *Atheism in Christianity* to present a fascinating combination of Marxist theory and science fiction, building something neither exclusively Christian nor atheist. You can find the [full abstract here](#) or in the University of Toronto Press *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*, Volume 30, Issue 2, Summer 2018, pp. 106-119.

New Religious Studies Department Website!

Put together by student David Flaherty



The Department of Religious Studies has a new, improved, and more accessible website! Please feel free to browse each page and offer any suggestions and/or advice you have for the department to continue expanding and developing its website! If you have any questions regarding any content, please contact Dr. Joanne Maguire.

(jmrobin2@uncc.edu)

"Religion and Power" Graduate Studies Conference

Hosting the second annual Religious Studies Graduate Conference, March 2017

BY SAM DAVIS



PHOTO BY JENNA BAKER

Thanks to the hard work and dedication of this department's graduate students, we were able to host the second annual graduate conference, "Religion and Power," in March 2017 in the Student Union on UNC Charlotte's campus.

Dr. Julia Moore served as the kickoff speaker with her lecture, "Religious Constructs of Racism and Power in America" and Dr. Martha Reineke of the University of Northern Iowa

presented the closing keynote address, "Disgust, Violence, & Politics: Thinking With and Against Mimetic Theory in the Time of Trump."

Presentations spanned disciplines around a focused topic related closely to issues of diversity.

Students from Florida State University; Virginia Tech; Iliff School of Theology; University of Chicago; Duke; UC Santa Barbara; Georgia State University; University of Denver; the Graduate Theological Union; Southern Methodist University; Middle Tennessee State University; University of Hawaii; Manoa; and Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, India participated either in person or remotely.

Drs. Sean McCloud, John Reeves, the late Dan White, Eric Hoenes, Kent Brinna, Barbara Thiede, Joanne Maguire, and James Tabor all served as faculty respondents.

Early-Entry M.A. Program in Religious Studies

Get a Jump on Your Graduate Education

Since the spring of 2016, we have offered the opportunity for students interested in our M.A. program to earn up to 12 graduate credit hours while completing their undergraduate religious studies major. Exceptional undergraduate students attending UNC Charlotte are encouraged to apply to graduate programs and begin work toward their graduate degree before completion of their baccalaureate degree. In those programs offering this outstanding opportunity, undergraduate students can get a head start on their graduate degree.

A summary of the program is provided to the right, but if you would like more information, see the [website of the Department of Religious Studies](#) and click the Early Entry Graduate Program link under the Undergraduate Studies tab. Please speak to the department's graduate program director (Barbara Thiede) and undergraduate program director (Celia Sinclair) if you are interested in this opportunity.

Benefits:

- Early Entry students will have provisional acceptance to the graduate program, pending the award of the baccalaureate degree, generally within two semesters.
- The M.A. in Religious Studies Early-Entry program is accelerated. Under this model, up to twelve hours earned at the graduate level may be substituted for required undergraduate hours. In other words, up to twelve hours of graduate work may be "double-counted" toward both the baccalaureate and graduate degrees. Individual programs may allow additional hours at the graduate level to be substituted. In no case may more than 12 hours be double-counted.
- Early Entry students will be charged undergraduate tuition and fees for all courses (graduate and undergraduate) for which they register. Upon completion of the baccalaureate degree, students will be charged graduate tuition and fees.

Other events hosted by the UNCC Religious Studies Dept.

The department hosted faculty from regional institutions for a day-long retreat at Center City in connection with our Wabash pedagogy study on April 7, 2017. Bobbi Patterson, Professor of Pedagogy at Emory University, led the plenary session, and small groups worked with the Wabash report and discussed common pedagogical issues such as writing, critical thinking, recruitment, assessment, and classroom techniques, both in general and institution-specific discussions.

The department also hosted the second annual Public University Chairs of Religious Studies meeting on April 8, 2017, at Center City. This event brought a dozen chairs to Charlotte to discuss recruitment and retention of majors, marketing and public relations, and strategic planning, among other topics.

Requirements:

- To be considered for Early Entry admission, a student must be enrolled at UNC Charlotte and complete and submit an application via the Graduate School's admissions system, <https://mygradschool.uncc.edu>, and supply supporting documents.
- A student may be accepted at any time after completion of 75 or more hours of undergraduate course work, although it is expected that close to 90 hours of undergraduate course work will have been earned by the time the first graduate course is taken.
- A student must have at least a 3.2 overall GPA.
- A student must have taken and earned an acceptable score on the appropriate graduate standardized test.

Alumni Update: Holly Burgess

A 2014 RELS graduate reminisces on her religious studies background and talks about her future in public policy

BY HOLLY BURGESS

To say my time as an undergraduate in the Religious Studies department at UNC Charlotte shaped me as a scholar would be... an understatement. You just can't compete with a curriculum that gives you everything and more in any given lesson – from science to sexuality, religious wars to inner enlightenment, there's nothing about life on earth that the study of religion does not touch. This unrestricted scope allows students in all walks of life to enjoy RELS courses, and enjoy them I did! I met some of my favorite and most respected professors within the department. Words cannot do justice to how grateful I am of my time at UNCC, as I was given endless opportunities to grow intellectually and personally. I will never forget the day I decided to declare RELS as my major (I had been a Pre-Business major initially). I waltzed into Dr. Dan White's office, eyes wide upon entering a space that felt both grand and inviting all at once, and he welcomed me into the department with open arms. That moment I knew I had found my way home, as countless students had done before me. I studied under exceptionally bright and enthusiastic professors, received invaluable support and instruction, and was able to join Dr. James Tabor on his Mt. Zion excavation in Jerusalem during the summer of 2014. My undergraduate career was bookended by brilliant experiences, as I left just as wide-eyed and excited as I had come. When I graduated early in 2014, I took the opportunity to travel to South East Asia where I lived and worked in Thailand through an Environmental Conservation and Preservation Internship. There, I trained specifically as an elephant mahout (caretaker) and

lived with a family in an indigenous Akha tribe. My experience in Thailand was unlike any other – I had the unique privilege of learning the Akha language, customs, and religious tradition from the inside, and was able to bond with our world's gentle giant as best as any man can. My magnificent girl, Seng-Tong (meaning golden light from the heavens) was injured from the inhumane practice of carrying benched tourists on a mountain trek. Her intelligence, composure, and appetite always amazed me! She was a middle-aged woman who passed too

I went abroad again for graduate school, and finished early with a Research Master's in Religious Sciences from the Universiteit van Amsterdam in spring of 2017. As a grad student, I presented a lecture in an international conference for the Dutch Association for the Study of Religion (Nederlands Genootschap voor Godsdienstwetenschap, NGG) in fall of 2016. It was thrilling to speak in front of our keynote speaker and world renowned Egyptologist, Dr. Jan Assmann. Before graduating, I completed a work placement in the Allard Pierson Museum,

studying around priceless ancient artifacts and learning the back-end of museum operations. Whether it is in the field, excavating through the layers of history, working in the museums, presenting the findings, or in the classroom, where that knowledge is passed on in an educational narrative, my heart beats for RELS. My longtime aspiration to someday teach RELS courses was only magnified by the taste I got from teaching courses at the Universiteit van Amsterdam (UvA). I hope to soon be back in the classroom as I've found I belong to academia, in any form or fashion, and that is all thanks to UNCC's Department of Religious Studies.



Photo By Holly Burgess

early, but our friendship compelled me to continue my travels even if I would not sacrifice my studies. At the end of my stay with the Akha tribe, I underwent a surprise initiation ritual into their religious community – a night I will always treasure. I learned much from the village elders while I was there, and I was able to teach them things I had learnt as a RELS student as well. I will likely carry that inclination with me everywhere in life – the intercultural exchange of knowledge and dogma.



CALLING ALL ALUMNI

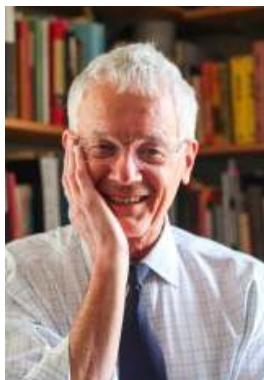
We want to hear from you!

Send Dr. Maguire an email
(jmrobin2@uncc.edu) to
let us know what you're doing!

David Nirenberg and John Stratton Hawley

These scholars spoke for the 33rd and 34th Annual Witherspoon Lectures

BY SAM DAVIS



Dr. John Hawley delivered a lecture entitled "Paradise Lost?: Krishna's Forest Playground Confronts the 21st Century" on February 12th, 2018 for the thirtieth annual

Loy H. Witherspoon Lecture in Religious Studies.

In 2016-17, Hawley was a Fulbright-Nehru Fellow in India where he worked on a project called "The New Vrindavan," which formed the basis for his 2018 Witherspoon Lecture.

Hawley is the Claire Tow Professor of Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University. His most recent books on India's bhakti traditions are *A Storm of Songs: India and the Idea of the Bhakti Movement* (Harvard, 2015), *Sur's Ocean* (with Kenneth Bryant, Harvard, 2015) and a poem-by-poem commentary called "Into Sur's Ocean" (Harvard Oriental Series, 2016).

A Storm of Songs received the Coomaraswamy Book Prize from the Association for Asian Studies in 2017. Hawley has received multiple awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Smithsonian, and the American Institute of Indian Studies. He was a Guggenheim Fellow and has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.



David Nirenberg, a professor and dean at the University of Chicago, delivered the 33rd annual Loy H. Witherspoon Lecture in Religious Studies on Monday, Feb. 6, at UNC

Charlotte Center City.

His lecture, "Neighboring Faiths: Jews, Christians and Muslims," examined how Jewish, Christian, and Islamic societies have interacted with and thought about each other from their origins to present day.

Nirenberg is the Deborah R. and Edgar D. Jannotta Distinguished Service Professor of Social Thought and History and Dean of the Social Sciences Division at the University of Chicago. In his work *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today*, Nirenberg explored how Muslims, Christians and Jews lived with and thought about each other during the Middle Ages and what the medieval past can tell about how they do so today. His other works include *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages and Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*.

Stanford Professor Tanya Luhrmann, author of *When God Talks Back* (2012), will deliver the 2019-20 lecture, and Harvard Professor Mark Jordan, author of *Convulsing Bodies* (2014) is scheduled for 2020-21.

The Witherspoon Lecture in Religious Studies, the oldest and most prestigious endowed lecture series at UNC Charlotte, was established in 1984 to honor the distinguished career and service of its namesake, who was the first chair of the Department of Religious Studies in the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at UNC Charlotte. Witherspoon remained professor emeritus of philosophy and religion until his death on Jan. 15, 2017.

Candida Moss visits UNC Charlotte

Dr. Moss spent time with students and presented her recent publication

BY SAM DAVIS



PHOTO BY SAM DAVIS

Dr. Moss (right) Pictured with Dr. Jon Marks of the Anthropology Department

Candida Moss is a respected New Testament biblical scholar, author of many well-received award-winning books, columnist for *The Daily Beast*, CBS contributor on Papal news, and has been prodigious in her contributions to news outlets and TV spots from *The New York Times* to *National Geographic*. She is also Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham. Her book, *Bible Nation*, is an unsettling work attempting to address the issue of artifact appropriation by the Green family, the owners of Hobby Lobby and creators of the Museum of the Bible in Washington D.C.

Dr. Moss visited UNCC's campus last October as a guest in undergraduate classes and to present the findings in her book just recently published with Yale professor Joel Baden. Her lecture ultimately concluded that the Green family has provided for an increase in violence through their desires to make money as well as their agenda of making the United States a "Bible nation."

Alice L. Tate Lecture Series in Judaic Studies

The department invited Drs. Carol Meyers and Annette Yoshiko-Reed for the 20th and 21st Tate Lecture series in 2016 and 2017 respectively

BY SAM DAVIS

Annette Yoshiko-Reed on “The Apocalypse and Its Jewish Afterlives”

The 2017 Tate Lecture on October 16 featured Annette Yoshiko Reed, an Associate Professor in the Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies and Program in Religious Studies at New York University.

Her lecture was based on her research focusing on angels, demons, apocalypses, and the afterlives of Second Temple Judaism in Late Antiquity. Dr. Reed co-authored the book, *Enoch from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* with Dr. John Reeves, published in May, 2018 by Oxford University Press (see pp. 4)

The Alice Tate Lecture in Judaic Studies is possible through an endowment by Tate of New York, who also endowed the Isaac Swift Distinguished Professorship in Judaic Studies at UNC Charlotte.

Carol Meyers on “Holy Land Archaeology: Where the Past Meets the Present”

The 2016 Tate Lecture on October 19 featured Duke University Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies Carol Meyers, sharing her expertise in biblical studies, archaeology, and gender in the biblical world. She has been a co-director or staff member on many archaeological field projects, a consultant for media productions such as DreamWork’s *Prince of Egypt*, and published *Women in Scripture*, a dictionary of women in the Bible, which is considered the most comprehensive account of biblical women ever made.

Unique Course on the Catholic Sex Abuse Crisis

In Fall 2017, students were visited by experts for help with independent research

BY SAM DAVIS



Photo courtesy of Getty Images

Since at least the mid-1980s, major national press outlets have been reporting on and the Catholic hierarchy has been aware of the problem of sexual abuse by clergy and members of religious orders. In addition to the trauma of the abuse—for those subjected to it as well as their friends, family and co-parishioners—the way that the leadership of the Catholic Church has responded generated shock, rage, and pain as well as severely damaged the cultural authority of the Church.

In the course “Contextualizing the Catholic Sex Abuse Crisis,” taught by Dr. Kent Brintnall, students were asked to develop their own research projects on some aspect of this “crisis,” as the material is so vast no one scholar could cover it in its entirety. This was made clear by the visit of Terry McKiernan (pictured above), founder and president of [BishopAccountability.org](#), the largest single archive of all media related to the crisis at large. Terry spoke on his experience in his talk “Apocalypse Past, Present, and Future: Archiving the Catholic Sex Abuse Crisis” held on October 19, 2017. He also visited the class where he provided helpful insight for the student projects. The class was also visited by psychologist Mary Gail Frawley-O’Dea, a Charlotte native who has written on the psychoanalytic side of the crisis, and Dr. Ann Gleig, Religious Studies Professor at University of Central Florida, who spoke on sexual abuse in Buddhist contexts.

Reflections on the “Horror and the Holy” film series

BY JAKOB BREUNIG

How does Adam Scott’s dysfunctional family and their disastrous fate in *Krampus* help us think about the frequently exhausted when not completely jaded attitude in the United States around Christmas? How might Joss Whedon’s *The Cabin in the Woods* allow us to think about ourselves as engaging in a kind of ritual activity when we watch a horror movie? Does the vindictive and destructive plot of *The Craft* really reflect pagan practice, or just our own dismissal of young women? Were the Puritans of New England really worried that the devil would steal their children like they were in *The Witch*? And how might Guillermo del Toro’s vampires in *Cronos* help us think about the interaction between religion and globalization?

The Religious Studies department’s Horror and the Holy film series, organized by Dr. Eric Hoenes, provided exciting and engaging materials for the RELS affiliated and the RELS curious alike to engage with these questions and others by putting scholarship on religion to



Anya Taylor-Joy as the character Thomasin in Robert Eggers' *The Witch* (2015)

work interpreting popular culture. Each screening in this series was followed by an audience discussion led by a faculty moderator. These faculty brought expert knowledge on the religious subjects of their film and encouraged all those in attendance to explore what kind of work religion was doing in the films that were shown. These screenings and discussions did more than provide everyone with a good excuse to get together and get scared. They allowed everyone to see what happens in Religious Studies, to understand the interesting and valuable work that is done by scholars of religion.

FEATURED COLLOQUIA: Erik Braun's "Mindfulness: Dead or Alive"

The University of Virginia professor spoke on campus in early April 2018

BY GABRIELLE HALEY



Braun visited our campus on April 2, 2018 to discuss the persistence of mindfulness in a contemporary American setting. Titled "Mindfulness Is Dead! Long Live Mindfulness! On the Moral Transformations in Modern Meditation Practice," the talk centered on the way mindfulness meditation has adapted to appeal to the populace on a large scale. While on the surface it would appear that the "real" or "genuine" forms of mindfulness that are clearly connected to the practice's Buddhist foundations are dead, Dr. Braun ar-

gues that the opposite is indeed true; those forms of practice persist in alternate forms that are more easily distributed in a post-secular society.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) – a program founded and perpetuated by Jon Kabat-Zinn – is one of the primary examples provided by Dr. Braun of how such an age-old practice has evolved over time to better include a massive portion of the American populace. By keeping the dharma intact but repackaging its presentation, Kabat-Zinn was better able to appeal to his audience at the time, an audience that was primarily secular and scientific. Dr. Braun acknowledges dissenting opinions that say the Buddhist foundation has been removed from the American understanding of mindfulness, but his work

goes on to discuss how the moral rules and regulations attributed to an ancient practice have adapted alongside the societies in which they are housed in order to stay both present and applicable.

Erik Braun is an associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Virginia. He is the author of *The Birth of Insight: Meditation, Modern Buddhism, and the Burmese Monk Ledi Sayadaw* (University of Chicago Press, 2013); it won a Toshihide Numata Book Prize in Buddhism in 2014. His current book project, "A Great Awakening," explores the role of insight practice in contemporary reformulations of notions about the self and society within the globalized insight meditation scene.

SELECTED ADDITIONAL LECTURES & COLLOQUIA

Noah Solomon, "For Love of the Prophet: The Art of Islamic State-Making in Sudan"

Noah Solomon, Associate Professor of Religion at Carleton College, spoke at UNCC in April, 2018 taking up the topic of his recent book titled *For Love of the Prophet: An Ethnography of Sudan's Islamic State* in which he challenges the contemporary caricaturization of an Islamic nation by providing a detailed account of formation of state power in the Sudan. Solomon argues that the concept of an Islamic State is less of an impossibility than one is often led to believe, and can be a rich place for discourse in any area of political or religious critique.

Gestures of Power: An Interdisciplinary Asian Studies Workshop

On May 4, 2018, scholars including students and faculty from across disciplines spanning the Departments of Culture Studies, Dance, History, Languages, and Religious Studies came together at UNCC's Center City to discuss works-in-progress as related to Asian Studies. The conference was designed to explore the diverse ways that power has been constructed, exercised, expressed, and contested across Asia and studied in academia. From our department we had Will Sherman as a presenter and Janna Shedd as an attendee.

Jon Bialecki, "Speculative Religion and the Belief/Disbelief Complex"

Jon Bialecki is a fellow in the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh. His talk traced how information technology has created a crisis within the Mormon Church, raising fears of apostasy - but also how a Mormon group has married 19th century speculative imagining and 21st century anticipations concerning information technology and produced a new form of religious practice that seems to be immune from the church disciplinary apparatus. This phenomenon draws our attention to the necessities and dangers of speculative thought for American institutional religion.

Digging Up the Past in Jerusalem

Staff from the UNCC archaeological dig in Israel tell us the excavation's current happenings and what the future holds

BY THE MT. ZION STAFF



Ella Andrews, Anthropology major, working on ceramic restoration

The 2018 Mt. Zion season in Jerusalem focused on four major goals: 1) setting up our new Mt. Zion Archaeological Excavation Headquarters; 2) doing post-excavation work on our finds from past seasons at both the Jerusalem site and the "John the Baptist" Suba cave; 3) working on official academic final reports on excavation work since the year 2000; and 4) carrying out a session of strategic digging at our Mt. Zion site.

All four goals were amazingly successful. We had a specially selected staff of 18, led by Dr. Shimon Gibson of History, Dr. James D. Tabor of Religious Studies, and Dr. Rafael Y. Lewis, who is our resident co-director in Jerusalem. Dr. Robert McEachnie of History directed our Education Abroad program with 12 UNC Charlotte students this year which includes three majors in Religious Studies.

The excavation was sponsored through the generosity of a number of individuals,

to whom we are grateful, and the work at the headquarters was sponsored by the Loy H. Witherspoon bequest.

The new archaeological headquarters is located just one block away from the Old City of Jerusalem, in a lovely building from the 19th century owned by the St. Vincent de Paul Sisters of Charity Center. It is a perfect space for our needs with a gated courtyard, office areas, storage rooms, laboratory space, kitchen, and bathroom. The staff worked tirelessly to organize and begin processing artifacts from previous years with the goal of publishing two official excavation report volumes in 2019-2020. These volumes, dealing with the Suba Cave, where we excavated since 2000, and the Mt. Zion excavations carried out by UNC Charlotte since 2008, will be published by the prestigious Israel Exploration Society. Both students and staff carried out excavations at the Mt. Zion site itself. This year we concentrated on three main areas at our Mt. Zion site with some specific

dozens of coins, ceramic vessels, and other artifacts that enable us to further clarify the dating of the various strata. The ancient street was particularly important as it links up with previous excavations inside the Old City. Later this semester there will be a major press release on this significant discovery. Full excavations are



An Ancient Road Emerges from the Past



Dr. Gibson lecturing after pottery washing each day

strategic goals in mind—uncovering an ancient street that dates back at least to the Byzantine period, and perhaps earlier, excavation of the lower levels of a 1st century CE mansion with well preserved rooms with ceilings and the excavation of the fills within a dry moat that ran in front of the Fatimid fortification wall. Significant discoveries were made, including

planned for 2019 as we move toward our longer-term goals of turning the site into a permanent archaeological park that will highlight the history of Jerusalem from the Iron Age up through to the late Ottoman period (19th century)—over 3000 years of history. The centerpieces of our excavation are the well-preserved ruins of a 1st century CE priestly mansion that was destroyed in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE and an adjacent structure dating back to the Hasmonean period (late 1st century BCE).

Students interested in participating in the 2019 excavation, which earns six hours of credit in either Religious Studies, History, or Liberal Studies, should contact Dr. Robert McEachnie in the Department of History (rmceachn@uncc.edu).

To find out more, please visit the website:

digmountzion.uncc.edu